United Nations A/CN.10/PV.204

General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

204th Meeting
Tuesday, 30 April 1996, 10 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Hoffmann . . . . . (Germany)

The meeting was called to order 10.30 a.m.

Programme of work

The Chairman: Last Friday morning, the expanded Bureau approved the working timetable for the period 29 April to 7 May, which has been circulated to representatives. In this connection, it should be noted that, in response to the request of a large number of delegations, two informal, private meetings of the Committee of the Whole have been scheduled this week for the purpose of discussing appropriate mechanisms for selecting future agenda items for the Disarmament Commission.

Reports by Chairmen of Working Groups

The Chairman: I call on the Chairman of Working Group I.

Mr. Chirila (Romania), Chairman of Working Group I (*interpretation from French*): It is quite easy to talk about things that are working reasonably well. I can report that, in Working Group I, a true spirit of cooperation prevailed throughout our meetings last week. We put the available time and facilities to maximum use. We reviewed last year's Chairman's text, to which you yourself, Sir, made a fundamental and personal contribution.

We were able to review approximately 80 per cent of the text at our first reading. We have eliminated brackets and merged elements in important areas of the text. For instance, I would inform members that we have combined the introduction and definitions into a consolidated chapter. We have also combined chapters II and VII on the role of the United Nations. We consolidated the chapter on ways and means. We have also done considerable technical work to combine or move texts that generally resemble one another.

These are some of the important tasks accomplished by the members of the Working Group. I am convinced that the readiness of Commission members to work on technical matters will be accompanied by a desire to work on political matters as well. I hope that this augurs well for the coming week's work.

As I have already said, we reviewed the introduction, which has been consolidated with the chapter on definitions, and the chapters on scope and on ways and means. The chapter on institutional arrangements is broken down into two parts, one on the United Nations and the second on other institutional arrangements. The chapter on principles remains to be addressed, and I would venture to say that it will cause no serious problems because, in my own personal view and those of my colleagues, the chapters — particularly that on ways and means — are very carefully drafted. We are here above all to define ways and means for cooperation among States towards achieving some progress on this very sensitive issue.

From a practical standpoint, we are deeply aware of the fact that this is the last year for considering the text. We have cause for optimism, but we should not venture too far into ideas that cannot enjoy consensus. I hope that the spirit of cooperation that has prevailed in Working Group I's work will continue to do so and that it will

96-85603 (E)

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give us the satisfaction of furnishing a text that will be of use to the General Assembly.

I wish to mention a matter that I consider to be of great importance. We have talked enough at the expert level, I think, about international arms transfers and illicit arms trafficking. We must pass this package of ideas at the political level to the General Assembly, which would be in everyone's interest.

I would also point out that we have worked to standardize terminology. For instance, a consensus was reached on the disputed term "illicit arms trafficking", for which a number of other expressions had been used previously. "Illicit arms trafficking" is now the terminological standard used throughout all the texts.

We have also reflected the hope that the international Register of arms transfers will be further developed. There is a collective desire within the Group to combine the general aspects of international arms transfers with the more specific aspect of illicit arms trafficking. I hope that this will be reflected in the document.

We are determined to optimize our use of available time and facilities to achieve results. Today, we hope to conclude our first reading of the entire text. We may have to do further work on certain more sensitive issues in order to finish the text in time for a second reading by Thursday.

The Chairman: I think that Mr. Chirila is right to stress that this is our last year and am very encouraged that his Group is on the way to success.

I now call on the Chairman of Working Group II.

Mr. Erdenechuluun (Mongolia), Chairman of Working Group II: It is my pleasure to report that Working Group II began the consideration of agenda item 5, entitled "Exchange of views on the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament", on Thursday, 23 April. Working Group II devoted three meetings to a general exchange of views on the item.

I believe that the Working Group had very useful deliberations on the subject-matter. A number of delegations addressed the Working Group and presented concrete ideas and suggestions on the issue for consideration.

On Friday, 26 April, the Working Group embarked on a more focused and substantive discussion of the item. In addition to a number of proposals and suggestions that I referred to earlier, the Working Group has before it a working paper submitted by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the States members of the Non-Aligned Movement in the Commission for its consideration.

The Working Group will continue the examination of those proposals and ideas, as well as any other papers that might be submitted for its consideration. The Group will endeavour to benefit to the maximum from the limited time at its disposal in order to meet the expectations of the Disarmament Commission.

In conclusion, I should like to take this opportunity to thank all delegations participating in the deliberations of Working Group II for their spirit of cooperation, which I hope will continue in the coming days.

The Chairman: I am sure that all delegations will follow Mr. Erdenechuluun's advice. We are taking this subject very seriously and, of course, want to reach understandings in this field.

General exchange of views (*continued*)

Mr. Erdös (Hungary): Let me congratulate you somewhat belatedly, Sir, on your able chairmanship of the 1996 session of the Disarmament Commission. I also want to express my confidence that, under your effective leadership, the deliberations will continue to be steered towards the best achievable results, as was reflected in the reports of the Chairmen of the two Working Groups of the Commission.

I also wish to express my gratitude to your predecessor, Ambassador Erdenechuluun of Mongolia, for the way he guided the Commission's work last year.

Hungary, as a country associated with the European Union, joined in the statement presented on the first day of the general exchange of views by the Italian delegation on behalf of the Union. However, we would like to make some brief additional comments on the activities and agenda of this important body.

The Disarmament Commission has to date been a valuable component of the multilateral disarmament machinery, and it should continue to serve as a useful United Nations think-tank on global disarmament matters, although its actual achievements have more than once fallen behind our expectations. Today we wish to

register, as many others have done before us, our deep regret that, in spite of the wishes of the overwhelming majority of member States, the Commission could not reach a consensus on one of the substantive items originally envisaged for its agenda. We are convinced that the proposal to address the principles and guidelines on nuclear-weapon-free zones was a constructive and forward-looking initiative, and we can only hope that the failure to include it in our agenda this year will not serve as a precedent for the future activities of this body.

It remains our firm conviction that the regional approach, such as that relating to the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones, has its own role and its own significance, and can also have a beneficial effect on progress in other fields of disarmament activity. Global and regional approaches to disarmament complement each other in the nuclear context, and should be carried out parallel to each other. We are sure that there is common ground and a shared interest in moving forward at both levels. We must also be aware that our efforts should be targeted at achievable and practical results — keeping the ultimate objectives in mind — without creating situations in which some issues inevitably become hostage to others, to the detriment of the whole process.

Since the end of the cold war there have been several examples of important and tangible progress towards the solution of complex issues of disarmament in a variety of bilateral, regional and global settings. Other speakers have referred to many of these achievements. The two major nuclear-weapon States have reached agreements on several significant bilateral treaties, including the INF and START II Treaties. The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), as well as a set of confidence and security-building measures, have already proved useful instruments for conventional disarmament and stability in Europe. The establishment of new regimes by the Treaties of Tlatelolco and Pelindaba, the new signatures on the Rarotonga Treaty, and coordinated efforts to enhance security and stability in the Asian region are among the latest of these positive developments on a regional scale. Above all, the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons has undoubtedly created a major legal instrument — a basic guarantee for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons — which will benefit the entire international community.

Despite all this progress, international peace and security have not yet found a safe and satisfying berth. The long-standing bipolar nuclear confrontation has been replaced by mostly regional, subregional and intra-State conflicts arising from political, economic and social difficulties, and by massive violations of human rights, including those of ethnic minorities. Further progress is needed, and without undue delay.

It is reassuring to know that the prospects for new and significant achievements in disarmament are far from bleak. We have a more solid basis today for hoping and expecting that the comprehensive test-ban treaty will be finalized soon, and that it will be quickly followed up by the conclusion of a universal, non-discriminatory and effectively verifiable cut-off treaty, by the entry into force and implementation of the chemical weapons Convention, and by new measures for strengthening verification and transparency in arms control and disarmament across the board.

In our opinion, the road to major successes in these and many other areas of multilateral disarmament leads through a series of realistic, well-defined, consistent and target-oriented steps. In this context we believe that the idea of a new special disarmament session of the General Assembly (SSOD) could prove useful. We support the view that, before making any decisions on the timing of a new SSOD, thorough preparatory work is needed, and clear prospects for a meaningful outcome should be established, and clear-cut and substantive objectives formulated. In order to derive the maximum benefit from such an ambitious future event, we believe that we must carefully analyse the performance of the international community in the field of disarmament since SSOD I took place in 1978. We believe that, after having established such groundwork, a new SSOD could indeed provide us with a good opportunity to devise a fresh and promising disarmament agenda for the future.

With regard to the other issue being discussed by the Disarmament Commission during its current session, Hungary shares the view that illicit arms transfers have become one of the greatest potential dangers to international security. We believe that on the basis of a broader submission of full returns to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, greater transparency could be achieved in the licit transfer of armaments, which, in turn, would create an atmosphere more conducive to reduction in illicit arms transfers. We trust that future joint efforts will also lead to the creation of regional registers, and believe that the Wassenaar arrangement, among other measures, might serve as a catalyst to this end. We would also like to encourage Member States to take more decisive steps to improve and harmonize their procedures for national legislation in

the sphere of arms transfers, in order to better prevent illicit arms transfers.

Without questioning the legitimate right of every State to self-defence, we must note that, in the case of regional conflicts, the unconstrained accumulation of conventional weapons can, and unfortunately does, lead to especially grave consequences. My delegation, therefore, again welcomes all regional disarmament efforts, such as that taking place in the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

In conclusion, it is our sincere hope that the work on guidelines and principles for international arms transfers will be successfully concluded and a final document adopted by consensus at the end of this session.

Organizational matters

The Chairman: I call on the Secretary of the Commission.

Mr. Lin Kuo-Chung (Secretary of the Disarmament Commission): I have been informed by the Chief of the Planning and Meetings Servicing Section of the Office of Conference and Support Services about the tentative dates for the 1997 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission. In order to be able to make recommendations to the Committee on Conferences for consideration in August, the Office of Conference and Support Services has proposed the dates of 14 April to 12 May 1997 — the same four-week period reserved in previous years.

Of course, the exact dates and duration will be decided by the Disarmament Commission at its organizational session in December 1996. Accordingly, members of the Disarmament Commission may wish to endorse these tentative dates at this stage for the planning purposes of the Secretariat.

The Chairman: The meaning of that is we have to take a decision on a tentative schedule, within which we can then decide when exactly to hold our session. The forward planning means that rooms, Secretariat staff and interpreters will at least be planned on for a certain period of time.

Both 14 April and 12 May 1997 fall on Mondays. At one of the sessions that we usually have between our substantive sessions, we can decide on the actual time that we want to have; but this is enough time to give us the three weeks and one day that we normally have. Therefore, if members agree, we will give the Secretariat the green light for this tentative planning.

Sir Michael Weston (United Kingdom): I wonder if before taking that decision, we could have a little time to reflect on those dates. There are other important meetings that we need to fit in at that time of year, including, of course, one that is important to nearly all of us: the non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) preparatory committee.

The NPT depositories are in touch with the Secretariat about that, but the particular dates which Mr. Lin has just referred to would, I think, possibly cause problems for us, inasmuch as they would probably mean that we would have to have the NPT meeting straddling Easter, which I think would be unpopular with quite a number of delegations. I wonder if we might come back to this issue at our next plenary meeting, after we have had a chance to talk further to the Secretariat.

The Chairman: My little problem is, of course, that our next plenary meeting is scheduled for 7 May 1996, a time when most representatives from Geneva will not be here any more. Would it then be in order, to make it possible for them to participate, to take a decision on this at Thursday's meeting of the Committee of the Whole?

Sir Michael Weston (United Kingdom): That, or indeed the meeting of the Committee of the Whole tomorrow, would certainly be all right for me.

Mr. Abdel Aziz (Egypt): I would like, first of all, to thank the Centre for Disarmament Affairs for its early and swift preparations for next year, which should not lead us to a situation similar to this year's, where we were haggling over what dates to accept.

I understand that the preparations are based also on the same understanding: that we will have two rooms with two teams of interpreters. With that in mind, I am certain that the situation just described by the representative of the United Kingdom should be borne in mind; we should try to avoid having an overlap between the NPT meeting and our session.

The Chairman: That overlap should be avoided. I think it can be avoided, because the time set aside is more than four weeks. Normally we meet for three weeks and one day, so we can either introduce the NPT issue at the beginning or at the end — I see the

representative of the United Kingdom nodding. I suppose we will settle this and take a more formal decision tomorrow, if possible, in the Committee of the Whole.

I call on the Secretary of the Commission.

Mr. Lin Kuo-Chung (Secretary of the Disarmament Commission): The Commission could discuss these questions in the Committee of the Whole, as that body holds informal meetings and can take informal decisions which could be formalized on Tuesday, 7 May 1996, at the plenary meeting.

The Chairman: That is a perfect idea.

Mr. Ravanchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Like previous speakers, I want to support and welcome the proposal made by the Secretariat on the tentative schedule of the Disarmament Commission for next year.

I would like to put on record our position of principle on this matter. We attach great importance to the Disarmament Commission and to its substantive sessions. We are of the view that meetings of non-proliferation Treaty bodies, or any other disarmament-related meetings, should not disturb the dates of the substantive sessions of the Disarmament Commission, which is a regular session. The Secretariat, as well as States, should try to respect the schedule of meetings of this body. Perhaps we should try to accommodate meetings of States parties to various disarmament treaties in ways that do not create any problems for the Disarmament Commission.

The Chairman: Yes, that is our understanding. I suppose that it would be wise to hold both meetings back to back here in New York so that people do not have to go back and forth all the time.

The next plenary meeting of the Disarmament Commission will take place on Tuesday, 7 May. The Committee of the Whole will meet that morning at 10 a.m., to be followed by the plenary meeting, which could take place at 11 a.m. The main objective will be to consider and adopt the report of the Disarmament Commission as well as to hear concluding statements by delegations.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.